

**SUMMARY OF THE
ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD MEETING
DECEMBER 05, 2001**

The Accrediting Authority Review Board (AARB) of the National Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Wednesday, December 05, 2001 at 1:30 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST) as part of the Seventh NELAC Interim Meeting in Arlington, VA. The meeting was led by Ms. Caroline Madding of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A list of action items is given in Attachment A. The list of participants is given in Attachment B. The purpose of the meeting was to cover issues in the published agenda.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS AND REVIEW OF AGENDA

Ms. Madding opened the meeting by introducing current members. Judy Duncan, chairperson, and George Mills were unable to attend. Due to the fact that there were only two Board members present, the meeting was held as an open forum and open discussion was encouraged.

AARB MEMBERSHIP AND VACANCY

It was announced that there is one opening on the AARB at this time. Names can be submitted to the Board of Director Chair, Jeanne Hankins. Ms. Madding stated that according to the NELAC Standards three members of AARB must be from NELAP recognized Accrediting Authorities (AA). Therefore, the new member will have to be from such an AA.

AARB RENEWALS EXTENSION REQUEST

This was the interim year for Accrediting Authorities (AA) to be re-evaluated. Upon the approval of the AARB, extensions may be granted. Upon Jeanne Hankin's request, the AARB granted extensions to eight AAs EPA Regions conducting these evaluations.

NEW AA APPLICANTS

There was one new AA recognized under NELAP this past year; the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ).

Over the next six months, the AARB is going to be very busy reviewing the NELAP recognition process for Louisiana and any other entities that become recognized. The AARB will be checking the documentation for consistency and adherence to the NELAC Standards.

NELAP DOCUMENTATION

One of the AARB's findings in the first report was that documentation was hard to locate. It was the AARB's recommendation that all the documentation be forwarded and kept in one place. Las Vegas, NV was chosen by the NELAP. The AARB's is considering going to Las Vegas to review all the documentation and see how it is being maintained.

It was stated that the AAs do not have a specific list of original documents to be kept in Las Vegas, NV. Every record related to NELAC should be in one location for the AARB to examine. This means that the originals or certified copies should be stored in Las Vegas. No photocopies are acceptable. Certification means any registered records or formal documentation that has a stamp of approval on it.

It was noted that NELAP should clarify exactly which records to be kept in Las Vegas and which records will be kept in the regional offices. Records that are needed in the regions should not be shipped back and forth to Las Vegas. The records go from the EPA to NELAP for review and then to Las Vegas. Chapter 6 of the NELAC Standards list documentation regarding what NELAC needs to keep. Section 6.3.1 defines the type of documentation required.

One of the principals of this organization is to ensure that we have uniformity across the board. Any documentation pertaining to or containing any NELAC information is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Uniform record keeping is a necessity for all States to be assessed on an equal basis. The AAs want to guarantee equal evaluation practices among the EPA, States, and AAs. It was suggested that in the upcoming year a review of the evaluations be done for Louisiana and Texas and the EPA (assuming TX and EPA become AAs) to confirm uniform evaluation procedures were used.

AARB member, Dr. Carl Kircher, asked Mr. Louis Johnson what version of NELAC was Louisiana assessed against. Mr. Johnson replied that Louisiana was tested against the 1998 version of Chapter 6. The current requirements are uncertain because the changes implemented in 2001 were not immediately effective.

Mr. Johnson said that even though some of the States are currently not AAs as of yet, in the future, all States should become AAs. NELAC has not convinced many states that they need to be an accrediting authority; however, many others are accepting NELAC standards. The Standards should be written so that there is uniformity among assessment procedures.

RESTRUCTURING

The open discussion shifted to the topic of restructuring NELAC. It was asked what happens to the AARB after restructuring occurs. Ms. Madding believes that it will not affect the AARB because it is appointed by the NELAP Director to fulfill the NELAP Director's directives.

Commenting on the effect of restructuring, it was stated three things that may not fit in the standard development organization: (1) the AARB should be a NELAC group, (2) the AARB should be a committee within NELAC, and (3) the AAs should become a new organization. The reasoning is that the Standards are used to judge the AAs.

It was argued that it gives the AA group a formalized vehicle. Removing Chapter 6 from the standards group was NOT recommended.

A statement was made that Chapter 6 should stay with the standard body. Also stated was that the AARB should remain part of the AAs within the voting group, and that NELAP is going to be heavily involved with the restructuring of NELAC. It was suggested that the AARB have at least two contributing members.

TWO-YEAR REVIEWS OF AAS

To date, most agencies have asked for an extension. Dr. Carl Kircher requested clarification of the deadlines. The original extension was granted for 60 days. Second extensions, requiring EPA approval, have no time limit.

It was asked how the extensions were allowed. The answer to his question was that the Transition Committee, at the NELAC meeting in Salt Lake City, approved the extension process. The accrediting agency could request an extension from the NELAP Director for 60 days. If another extension is needed the NELAP Director could ask the AARB for it. The policy expires at NELAC 8.

Mr. Johnson asked if there is currently a standard form for the renewal process. Ms. Madding read the section of Standards that defines the process of renewal. He also asked that the AARB go back and confirm that the renewals have been done consecutively.

HOW TO CONDUCT AN ANNUAL AUDIT OF THE NELAP PROCESS FOR RECOGNIZING AAS

Dr. Kircher asked for suggestions on procedures to be used for this process.

It was stated that the ISO Guide 61 should be used as criteria for annual assessments. The document is written in general language to apply to a wide range of audits yet can be adapted and applied to each specific task. Dr. Kircher asked for comments on specifics to be used in the document.

It was suggested that Chapter 6 of the NELAC Standards had the specifics already listed in the document. This includes the On-Site Assessment (OSA) committee would verify the documents

according to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). This will ensure that the OSA committee efforts to prove and document the SOPs were recorded, accomplished, and the completeness of the application.

It was stated the mission of the AARB is to confirm or evaluate the AA recognition process honestly to assure consistency across states by using uniform assessments. The assessments should be factual and not biased stating the good as well as the bad points. The report should be written and presented as a document.

CLOSING

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m. EST.

ACTION ITEMS
ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD MEETING
DECEMBER 05, 2001

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Revise AARB SOP for assessing NELAP AA recognition	NELAC 8
2.	Review NELAP documentation control system	NELAC 8
3.	Using ISO Guide 61 and Chapter 6 requirements, AARB assess the NELAP process for 2-year reviews of AAs and assess NELAP process for recognizing AAs.	NELAC 8

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ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD MEETING
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